

THE CHURCH OF JACOB'S WELL

By Heba Hrimat

The Church of Jacob's well is located in Tel Balata in the eastern part of Nablus city. The 41 meter-deep well can be accessed by entering the Church, and descending the stairs to a crypt containing the well by a small winch and a bucket.

The Church was named after the well. According to Genesis 33: 18-20, when Jacob returned to Shechem, he camped before the city, and bought the land on which he pitched his tent and erected an altar. However the religious significance of Jacob's Well Church lies to the fact that it was built on the land where Jesus Christ set His feet. According to St. John's Gospel 4: 5-6 Jesus "came to a city of Samaria called Sychar, near the field which Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there." John's Gospel continues to describe a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman (later called Photeini, according to the Orthodox tradition), which took place while Jesus was resting at the well after a tiring journey.

The jar of water carried by the Samaritan woman still exists to our day, preserved in a glass frame on top of one of the pillars inside the Church, which the visitors can see clearly, also a small relic of St. Photeini's forehead is preserved within a beautiful reliquary of glass and metal.

There is a historic account of a long and debilitating struggle to build and maintain the Church of Jacob's Well, which dates back to more than sixteen centuries ago. The first attempt was made by St. Helen in the fourth century, but the Church was demolished in the 15th century by the leaders of the Samaritan rebellion in Nablus on the Day of Pentecost, when the first Bishop of Nablus was killed, along with twelve Priests and 11,000 Christians, and the Church was seized

afterwards.

The second attempt was by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, but this time it was destroyed by the Persians, who also destroyed 364 other Churches in Palestine and killed 5000 monks. A third attempt to build the Church was made by the crusaders in 1172 but it was again demolished after their defeat by Saladin in the Battle of Hattin 1187. In 1860 the Bishop of Gaza purchased the site and returned it to the Jerusalem Orthodox Patriarchate, construction began again, but this time an earthquake destroyed the Church in 1927.

The Church built in 1908 was still incomplete by 1979 when Archimandrite Philomenos who was serving there martyred for the Lord and was canonized a Saint by the Orthodox Church in 2009. His Holy relics, which have been working many wonders, are safely kept in a reliquary inside the Church.

In 1980, after the martyrdom of St. Philomenos, Father Ioustinos was sent by the Patriarchate to serve the Church of Jacob's well, with the goal to complete its building. Having faced many obstacles, he was finally granted the permission by the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to continue the building of the Church, as an honor for his help to the Palestinians during their uprising.

In order for the Church to reach its present state, Father Ioustinos worked "as an architect, a contractor, a beggar, and a painter" as he says, and truly he worked on every single detail from the design and the shape of the Church, to collecting donations for the construction, painting the icons, etc. All in all, it took him 11 and a half years to finish the Church inside out. And despite being exposed to repeated aggression and violent attacks and the numerous attempts of theft and destruction of the Church, Father Ioustinos refuses to retreat or bow.

Therefore, In honor of the magnificent importance of the

Church Jacob`s Well, there`s an annual Festal Divine Liturgy held and celebrated in the Church on the 5th Sunday after Easter of each year, officiated by the Patriarch, with co-officiating Bishops and Priests, among the presence of local Christians and pilgrims who come especially to attend this annual Feast.

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